

2015 AWARD WINNERS

Female Youth Athlete of the Year

Versatility on and off the track

Jayla Ellis has a wide range of skills on the track. Of course that is to be expected when you compete as a multi- event athlete. She embodies the phrase "Citius, Altius, Fortius" conquering five events when many would be happy to be successful in just one. In 2015, Jayla reached the pinnacle of success in the USATF Junior Olympic Program. She swept all 3 of her events (Pentathlon, long jump and 100m hurdles) at the Region II Championships at Slippery Rock University. Two weeks later she followed up with All-American performances in each event at the 2015 USATF National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships in Jacksonville, FL.

Jayla has participated in the National Junior Olympics before and had some great success. At the 2013 competition in Greensboro, NC, she placed 1st in the long jump. In this year's national event she did perform as great as she would have hoped. This is why taking 8th place and achieving all American status in this event this go-around was special. "Even though I didn't place as high, the long jump was my favorite performance. I wasn't expecting to do that well so gutting out that performance felt great. With my two other events, it was a big year for me."



Now 15 years old, Jayla has been competing in track for the last 4 years. She started at the age of 11 when her basketball coach (who also happened to coach the long jump) convinced her to try the long jump believing she could do well in that discipline. "I had not participated in long jump before, but thought I would give it a shot because he believed in me and my abilities."

Jayla's versatility on the track extends to activities off the track as well. This year she participated in rowing from August – October and said it has great benefits. "Rowing really helps build your lower body strength. I think it will pay off in the long jump. She also participates in several extracurricular activities like game club and wants people to know that she keeps up with her academics and takes her grades very seriously achieving straight A's in school. In addition to being a great athlete and student, one can add gratitude and humility to Jayla's list of qualities. She thanked TRA several times throughout the course of this interview explaining she was humbled to be selected for this award. "I had no idea about the award but am happy to be chosen as the female youth athlete of the year."





Male Youth Athlete of the Year

Sometimes it's ok to keep score

"Keeping Score" is often times thought of in a negative light especially in partnerships or relationships. But for Ayden Owens, tracking performances and "keeping score" is at the center of his life as a decathlete. And if you tracked his scores in 2015 you would see that he's one of the top decathletes in the country for his age group. Ayden took home the crown in the Decathlon and the 400 meter Hurdles at the 2015 Region II Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships. This is no easy feat as the region competition welcomes athletes from three other USATF Associations – Mid-Atlantic, New Jersey and Niagara. He also placed 4th in the 110m hurdles securing a secure a spot in all three events at the National Junior Olympic Championships.

At the national competition in Jacksonville, FL, Ayden continued to post strong performances advancing through the rounds and placing in the top 20 for both the 110mH and 400mH (15th and 11th). He landed on the podium in the Decathlon with a total score of 5626 for 3rd place and earning All-American status. Ayden is no stranger to success at the National Junior Olympic competition as he placed 3rd in the pentathlon years ago in the 11-12 age group. With experience under his belt, he knew he could compete at the national level and had his mind locked in on placing in the top 3 for 2015 as well.

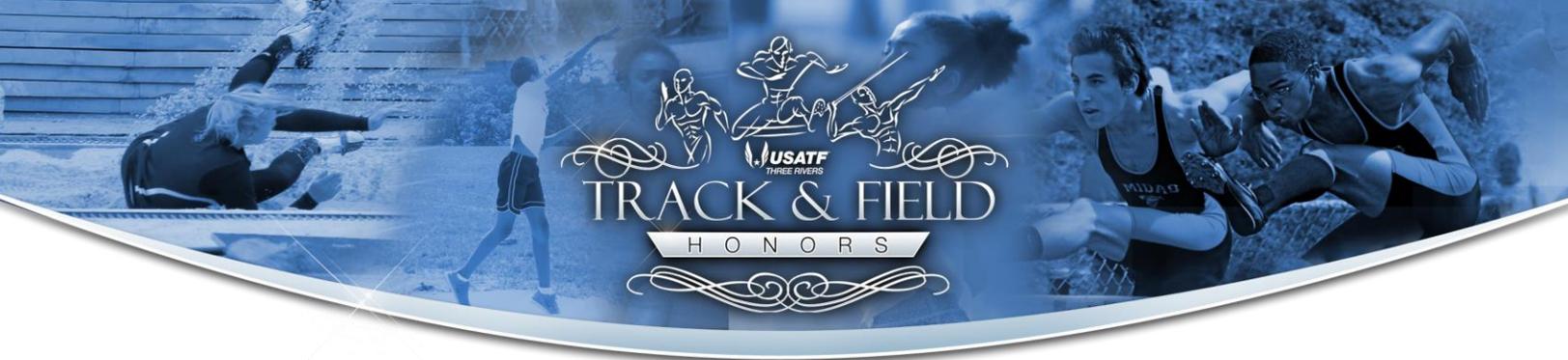


It takes a strong athlete to compete in just one event, let alone 10 events. It takes an even stronger athlete to be able to shift gears and participate in individual events at an elite, national level. But when asked about his favorite event, you get a better understanding of how he can he manage the stiff competition. "The 400m hurdles is my favorite event. It's such a grueling and painful race. It doesn't require as much technique (it still needs to be good) but you really have a chance to go out there and race on strength and will."

Ayden is a 15 year old sophomore who has been competing in track and field for the last 6 years. He is a member of Nadia Track club and really enjoys his time on the team, "It is a small team which makes for a very intimate setting. There are only about 8 of us and the coaches are really good. They also have a good hurdling program."

Ayden comes from an athletic family with several sibling actively involved in sports and a father who was an athlete at the University of Virginia. In addition to track & field, Ayden is also a wide receiver in football and has played point guard in basketball in the past. This year he cut out basketball to focus on where he could be most successful. This means training and competing more in track and field with plans to take up the Indoor pentathlon later this year. Ayden is a well-rounded athlete who also receives good grades and has a strong interest in becoming an engineer. He was somewhat speechless when informed of receiving the TRA Honors Award, "I am really surprised and fell honored. Makes me feel very accomplished!"





Open Athlete of the Year

It all started with a Bang "Pop"

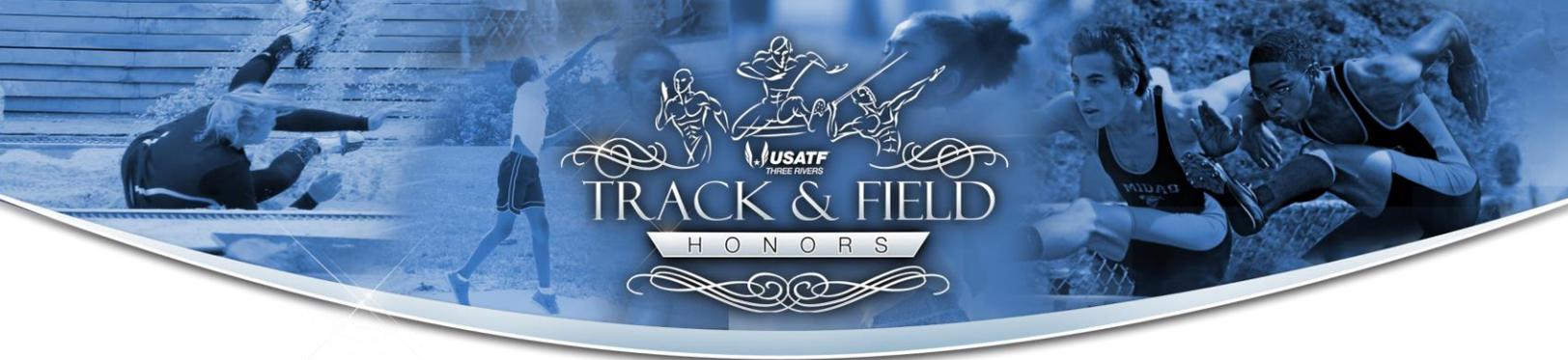
It's hard to believe that it's been only two years since Madison Wiltrout started competing in the javelin. But in those two short years she's become one of the best young, female javelin throwers in the country. In 2015 alone she secured the WPIAL and PIAA titles. At both meets she made record setting performances first throwing the spear 185-8 to clinch the national HS record at the WPIAL qualifier and later setting the PIAA record at Shippensburg University of 182-8. Madison recalls almost perfect external and internal conditions when she set the national record, "It was my first throw of the competition. I was very relaxed, pretty loose actually and there was no pressure on me. It was warm and not windy at all; really perfect conditions for the javelin. Honestly, I wasn't expecting such a big throw through this early on. I wasn't even aware that I had broken the record."

Madison had a busy spring starting with the Penn Relays which set the tone for what would be a stellar season. After breaking records at several high school competitions she had plans to continue her success throughout the summer but was sidelined by injury. "I had plans to go to the USA Junior Nationals, but got a partial UCL tear. I was excited to see what I can do, but will just have to wait until next year when I am all healed up."

It was Madison's grandfather, or as she affectionately calls him "Pop," who encouraged her to try the Javelin. Pop never threw the javelin himself nor is he a coach of the discipline. "He just has an eye for a throwing arm" Madison explains. Perhaps that eye comes from watching his granddaughter participate as a pitcher in baseball for many years. As her baseball career was coming to a close, she was in search of another sport where she could throw something. She's tried both the discus and shot, but out of all the throws the javelin (or weird looking stick) was most similar to her pitching range of motion.

In addition to track & field, and the previous baseball career, Madison also participates in basketball and has since she was 4 years old. She has even dabbled in musical theater playing Ursula in her high school musical. Madison is grateful to be recognized for her achievements "I was very surprised about the TRA Honors award. I didn't know anything about it, but I am honored to be recognized." If Madison 2015 season in any indication of her future in the sport, she'll continue to be on my watch lists and up for various awards for years to come.





Masters Athlete of the Year

Leading By Example

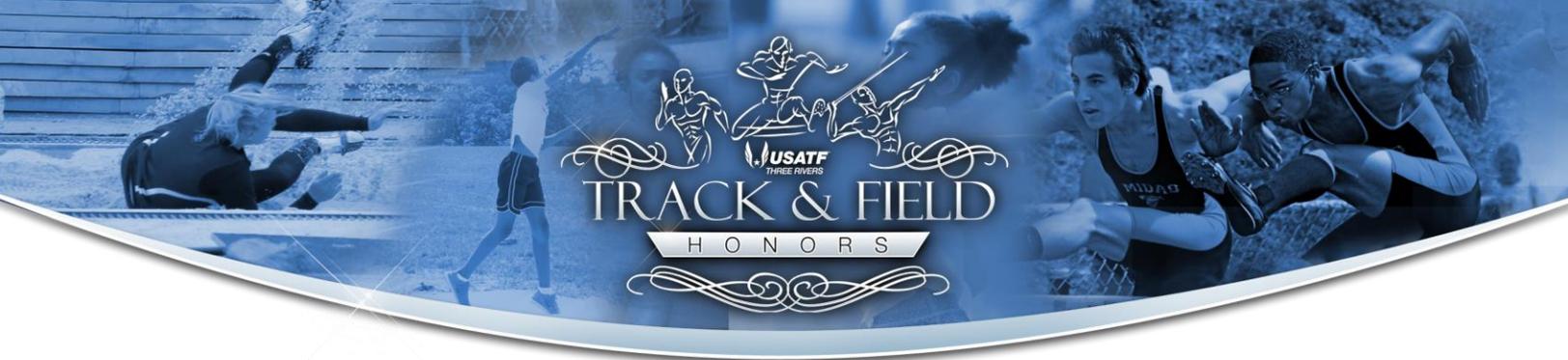
When you look at the performance list or results for TRA Masters Track & Field competitions there is one name you are sure to see: **Latonya Salley Sharif**. She does it all - jumps, sprints and throws and is quite the multi event athlete. Latonya started competing in track in 5th grade and continued throughout middle school and high school. While her primary events were long sprints she participated in whatever her coaches asked of her even running cross country a couple times.

Latonya's driven spirit is what motivates her to compete at the Masters level. She is a coach for Nadia Track Club and hopes her participation can help inspire the athletes. "Years ago track meets would host coaches relays. These events would really inspire and motivate the youth athletes. Because this doesn't happen anymore due to meet time constraints, we have to find creative ways to keep the kids engaged and motivated. I do that by leading by example. The kids also hold me accountable and have an opportunity to coach me or provide feedback when I am competing!"

Latonya's hard work has paid off. This year she broke the Association's master high jump record and her athletes couldn't be more proud of her efforts. She even had plans to participate in the National Masters Championship but strained a hamstring. When talking about the injury she jokes "See, I should listen to the advice I give my athletes and stretch!" Latonya was surprised and felt honored to be named Masters Athlete of the year explaining she participates because she thoroughly enjoys the sport.

When she is not competing herself or coaching athletes, you can find Latonya and her husband, Orande, attending events or other sports of their athletes. She also drives the church van on Sundays because she enjoys meeting new people.





Coach and Official of the Year

Double Duty

Whether you know him as Chuck Davis or Charles L Davis, chances are you have seen him at a track meet in one of the unsung roles. He is the lone coach for the River City Elite Track Club and is also a national level official. In both capacities he dedicates countless hours and resources giving back to youth.

Chuck's journey to becoming the coach of River City Elite started out of necessity rather than desire. After the founding coach decided to leave the team, there was no one available to fill the vacant role. With the team club threatened to be shut down, Chuck stepped up and took over. It only seemed like the right thing to do - give back to the program had done so much for him. Both he and his sister were former athletes of River City. It's been 8 years since he began coaching and Chuck is managing a 20-30 person roster. He enjoys track & field because all the athletes get to compete and be a part of team and loves to see the progress they make, "The team is young but has a promising future."

When he is not coaching, you can see Chuck setting down his stop watch and putting on his officiating uniform. He has been a certified official for the last 7 years and a national official since 2013. Certification is required to officiate in USATF functions and the process includes tests that get more and more difficult as you progress through the ranks. When asked why he chooses to officiate, he explains, "I am just a huge fan of the sport. I get a front row seat!" Chuck officiates at Junior Olympic and NCAA competitions primarily covering horizontal jumps. He has officiated on a national level for the 2013 USATF National Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships in Greensboro, NC.

Chuck was shocked to win not one, but two of the inaugural TRA Honor awards. He works with youth for his profession as well so it's just second nature to him to be involved in these activities. "I am astonished that I was selected. It's nice to be recognized and appreciated. This is a great initiative for the Association and should really help improve activity and volunteering." Chuck is a father of 3 and is also heavily involved in their activities.

